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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the case study of an attempt to bridge the gap between teacher and administrator preparation programs at Auburn University, Alabama, while engaging students in authentic learning situations at the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lee County. The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lee County serves 600 youth during the school year and another 750 in the summer months at 2 locations. Each of two classes, a doctoral level educational administration class and an undergraduate educational foundations class, engaged in projects that allowed university students to gain unique insights into the needs of the children and the community while providing necessary services to the clubs. The clubs in turn provided a learning laboratory for the students and professors. Many lessons were learned through the project. It was found to be essential to identify and consider agendas for the clubs and the college so that everyone could benefit. It was also important to keep the community involved and aware of the collaborative efforts. The project provided professional development opportunities for club staff, increased opportunities, such as tutoring, for club members, and increased learning experiences for college students and professors. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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Developing an Accountability Plan for the Boys and Girls Club: Building Bridges and Creating Learning Communities

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Introduction

Colleges of Education have been criticized for a perceived failure to fully prepare graduates for their future professions. Two primary criticisms are that future teachers and administrators have not had formal opportunities to apply theories learned through course work in real settings and that there is a disconnect between colleges and the community. Community agencies, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, offer a rich opportunity for learning and connecting theory to practice. Additionally, agencies such as these are often plagued with severe funding shortages. By working together, community agencies and colleges are able to maximize the use of resources while providing mutually beneficial and enriching learning opportunities for all involved.

In this paper we offer a case study of an attempt to bridge the gap between teacher and administrator preparation programs at Auburn University while engaging students in authentic learning situations at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Lee County. Each of two classes, a doctoral level educational administration class and an undergraduate educational foundations class, engaged in projects that allowed university students to gain unique insights into the children and community needs at the clubs while providing necessary services to the clubs. The clubs in turn provided a learning laboratory for our students and the professors. Our efforts were mutually beneficial as we worked to create learning communities within and among our organizations.

Service Learning

At our College of Education some faculty have been engaged in the creation and enactment of service learning opportunities. Service learning offers students authentic learning opportunities while providing a needed service to community/school agencies (Seals). According to Seals, there is growing evidence that service learning is linked to:

- Improved academic performance
- Higher achievement test scores
- Higher grades
- Increased academic engagement
- Advances in communication skills
- Increased social and personal responsibility
- Intent to serve the community in the future
- Increased acceptance of diversity
- Gains in self-esteem and moral reasoning
- Fewer risk behaviors

(Billig, 2000; Melchoir, 1999; Weiler et al., 1998; Final Report-National Evaluation of Serve-America; Shumer, 1994; Silcox, 1993; Dewsbury-White, 1993; Brill, 1994; Luchs, 1981; Conrad, 1980; Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Rutter & Newmann, 1983; Hamilton & Fenzel, 1988; Crosman, 1989; Waterman, 1993; Williams, 1993; Sager, 1973; Krug, 1991; Stockhaus, 1976; Reck, 1978; as cited in Seals).

Service learning, a curricular approach involving the integration of community service with academic goals, offers students an opportunity to learn through active participation in community service experiences that are collaboratively designed (ASLER, 1993; Wade, 1997). Service learning activities should be integrated into a student's academic curriculum in ways that encourage students to reflect about their observations and interactions and to think, talk, or write about these experiences. Service learning is focused on helping students develop a sense of caring for others while developing skills and aptitudes needed for their professional goals (ASLER, 1993, p. 1). It is important to differentiate between service learning and community service, however, as many times the two approaches are confused with each other. Community service is typically thought of as doing activities that meet a community need. There is no underlying assumption that students are learning while doing. In service learning, though, the experiences in which students participate provide a real community service, but also facilitate a deeper understanding of course goals and objectives. Another key difference between community service and service learning rests in the focus on collaboration. Service learning projects should be collaborative, engaging students and teachers as well as community members in the design of a project that benefits all involved (Wade, 1997).

There are four steps in a service learning project: 1) preparation, 2) service project, 3) reflection, and 4) celebration (Seals). Step one, preparation, involves identification of the service and learning goals as well as collaborative decision making about the community need to be served, possible solutions, and planning for the project. Step two, the service project, is the "heart of the service learning activity" (Seals, p. 13). This is the actual activity in which students are engaged. It should be on-going, challenging, and focused on meeting common needs. If students are to reap the most benefits possible from their service learning project, then they must engage in step three, reflection. Through structured reflection, students can learn to evaluate their personal biases, construct knowledge about their community and its resources, process information about institutional processes or policies, and critically analyze the situation in terms of social problems such as inequity (Seals, p. 13). Additionally, reflection offers students the opportunity to develop self-ownership of the project. Finally, step four, celebration, offers an opportunity to honor the efforts of those involved while also building support for the identified community need and future service learning projects.

The beginning of service learning in the United States occurred during the Progressive Education movement in the early twentieth century. Dewey (1938/1972) emphasized the importance of experiential and purposeful learning. School-based community service was emphasized in the "Project Method" of teaching developed by William Kilpatrick (1918). Community-based education was de-emphasized during the mid-twentieth century as schools in the United States responded to World War Two and the Industrial Age. Education during this time period was primarily focused on developing basic skills and preparing students to be productive workers. In the 1970s school-based community service began popular again. High schools were criticized by educational organizations for their lack of authentic learning opportunities and failure to adequately prepare students for their adult roles (NASSP, 1972; Martin, 1976). Both the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Panel on High School and Adolescent Education recommended that the education offered to adolescents should be relevant, offered in alternative settings, and emphasize the

importance of community involvement. In this way, students could apply what they learned in real-life settings. The roots of service learning began in the Progressive Education movement and have continued through inclusion in school-based community service and civics education (Seals). As a form of pedagogy it emphasizes the importance of learning while doing, service to the community, and collaboration.

Service learning makes sense for administrator and teacher preparation programs. Both programs have been criticized for remaining isolated from the "real world" and for a lack of field-based experiences. When engaged in service learning opportunities such as the ones we describe, students are experiencing real world learning, direct application of theory to practice, and are developing a greater ethic of care and civic involvement. These types of experiences help future leaders learn to operate in a collaborative fashion and have a clearer understanding of the community and its needs. These are important competencies for an administrator (or a teacher) to possess (ISLLC, 1996). Future teachers are offered opportunities to become more collaborative and better prepared to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population, as well as to become better prepared to deal with the complexity facing public education today.

Description of Our Work

In the next section of this paper we describe our efforts to enhance student learning while providing needed services, the development of an assessment/ accountability plan and enriched programs, for the Boys and Girls Clubs in our area. Once programmatic needs were identified at the clubs through the combined efforts of an educational leadership class and club personnel, a preservice teacher education course focused on enacting recommendations from the assessment, again working collaboratively with club personnel. We describe the efforts to build bridges between these class projects, provide services to the club, and continue efforts toward creating learning communities within and among these three groups.

Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Lee County

The Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Lee County offers a number of exciting programs and activities for youth ages 6-18. Program options focus on education and career development, character and leadership development, the arts, health and life skills, sports, fitness, and recreation. There are two official club sites in Lee County—one in Opelika and another in Auburn City—as well as an administrative office that oversees programming and development. Programs run five afternoons a week during the school year, from 2:30 pm until 6:30 pm and teen programs run until 8:30 pm. During the summer programs are available from 9:00 am until 6:00 pm. All programs are operated and supervised by full-time and part-time Youth Development Specialists with assistance from college students and other volunteers. The clubs serve 600 youth during the school year and another 750 during the summer months.

> The mission of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Lee County is:
> To inspire and enable all young people, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring citizens (Club brochure).

The clubs are funded through donations, grants, and community agencies such as the United Way. Money is generally very tight and the staff at the clubs and in the

administrative office often are required to multi-task if everything is to get accomplished. Volunteers, such as students from the college, provide extra hands and ideas and become essential to the smooth functioning of the clubs. Boys and Girls Clubs nationwide have a history of collaboration with school districts and universities. For example, in Milwaukee, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee, the Milwaukee Public Schools, and the city of Milwaukee collaborated to create a state-of-the art center that houses a neighborhood school and the Boys and Girls Club (Tiernan, 2001). This is only one example of the collaborations taking place across the country, especially as the need for high quality after school programming increases.

Doctoral Level Educational Leadership Class

In the fall of 2000, an Assessment and Evaluation in the Learning Organization class was taught using service learning pedagogy. The purpose of the class was to study assessment and evaluation practices that enable learning organizations to regularly use data for decision-making purposes. The course was designed to better prepare educational leaders for organizational decision-making through the use of techniques for collection, analysis and synthesis of data that foster the capacity building of members within the organization. The course was intended to help leaders gain a deeper understanding of how evaluative inquiry, a type of evaluation capacity building theory, can be applied to practice, particularly as organizations and expectations for those organizations become increasingly complex. Nine doctoral students participated in the course.

Prior to the beginning of the class it was determined that the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Lee County would serve as the organization which would be assessed. Wanda Lewis, Executive Director of the Clubs, met with Cynthia Reed, professor for the class, ahead of time to determine potential areas for exploration. Wanda then spoke with the class during the first two class sessions, providing an overview of the clubs as well as information about their needs. Class members then visited the clubs, noting observations, and identifying potential areas for data collection. Class members developed work proposals for addressing an area of information need within the organization and these proposals were presented to Wanda to be sure that they were areas where assistance was desired. Class members then alternately met on site to collect data, engage in dialogues with club staff members, and develop findings and recommendations or met in class sessions to learn new skills to apply, reflect about what they were learning and seeing, or to work on their materials for the clubs. These findings and recommendations were shared with staff members and eventually were packaged into a final report that was presented to the Board of Directors for the clubs.

The evaluative inquiry was organized around four components of organizational infrastructure: culture, leadership, communication, and systems and structures (Preskill & Torres, 1998). We also developed guidelines for assessment criteria and included items such as: 1) it is best when the users of the criteria are also developers of the criteria, 2) keeping things simple to use, 3) having challenging but achievable goals, and 4) being comprehensive in scope. The work teams focused on the following identified needs:

- Developing a survey for parents and club members to assess programming needs
- Finding ways to expand the budget, exploring grant opportunities
- Conducting a technology needs assessment
- Developing a newsletter format/communication plan
- Developing building/security plans
- Developing a plan for establishing a drama program
- Conducting a needs assessment and action plan/orientation materials for volunteers.

The results of these efforts were presented to the staff members and the Board of Directors at a December meeting both as a formal written report and a power point briefing. The findings were well received and prompted additional discussion among the board members about re-prioritizing their efforts. Board members and the Executive Director were asked to complete a brief evaluation of the class efforts and usefulness of the information provided. The results of this survey were very clear. The board appreciated the information and found it to be well thought out and useful. The one area where they would have liked additional information was regarding additional funding sources. The following semester, an undergraduate teacher education course was offered that built upon these findings.

Undergraduate Teacher Education Class

Prior to the work completed by the doctoral leadership class, service-learning had been attempted at the club with undergraduate teacher education students enrolled in a course concerning child learning, development, motivation, and assessment. This course provided an integrated overview of issues central to educational psychology: cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development, learning, motivation and measurement and evaluation in the context of instructional planning.

Each week the students in the class spent two hours a week at one of the two units of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Lee County. At first, their task was to observe the club members and staff in an effort to familiarize themselves with the culture and activities of the club. Each student was then instructed to develop a ten-week instructional program that would be of interest to the members of the club but built on the students' potential. The student led programs met once a week for one hour. Among the different programs offered there was instruction in rocket building, cooking, gardening, web-page development, team sports, dancing, arts and crafts, music, and reading, to name a few.

For the most part the activities were successful. Students were given a chance to develop their instructional skills in a content area in which they were comfortable and club members were exposed to a number of new and exciting ideas. A significant problem, however, was that some of the programs were of little interest to some of the club members. Those programs that were not especially well received by the members failed to produce "service" or "learning;" a lack of motivation quickly set in to both the university students and club members.

After considering the work of the graduate students' needs assessment of the club, we adjusted our efforts. In the Spring semester of 2001, instead of giving undergraduate students free reign in designing and implementing an instructional program of their

choice programs were developed in four areas: web-page design, drama, newsletter writing, and production of a public service announcement. We also decided that, due to the limited space at the club and the difficulty of arranging a time where all students could be at the club outside of class, the club members would come to the Auburn University campus to work with the pre-service teachers during their class time.

At the beginning of the course, the leadership of the club and Cindy Reed met with the thirty pre-service educators enrolled. Students were informed of the mission of the club and the partnership between the club and the Auburn University's College of Education. They were then informed of the intention to develop and implement programs asked for by the members of the club.

Upon completion of the activities two issues were of concern regarding the university students: (1) Did their experiences provide them with an increased awareness of the community and need and benefit of community involvement? and (2) Did the experience give them the opportunity to engage in "real world" activity?

Many students reported an increased awareness of the community and the need for and benefit of community programs such as theirs. At the end of the students' time with the club members the students were asked "What stands out to you about the program?" Examples include:

> "It was an important program that exposed us to the diversity in our town."
>
> "I didn't know that this many people didn't have access to basic [services]"
>
> "This was good stuff. We hear all the time about how teaching is a helping profession, but then you get out and meet the kids and then, you're like, 'Wow!' I thought I knew what to expect but there was no way I could have."

Most of the students seemed to appreciate the exposure, although some admitted to feeling uncomfortable at first. The clearest example of this was with a young woman who, after a little hesitation, confessed, "I don't ever remember being the [ethnic] minority. When the [community] came in it shocked me. I didn't feel scared or anything. It was just the first time I'd ever been like this."

Student response evidenced that our efforts provided application of skills in a real world setting. Fifty percent of the comments taken from the total number of students were domained here. For those who did not explicitly state that they were able to use their class knowledge, it was clear that, at a bare minimum, the classes were engaging—whether they liked it or not:

> "This is one of the best classes I've ever had at Auburn [University]. It was enjoyable. We were doing things. Some people don't like this, but I looked forward to class."
>
> "For me it was really nerve racking . . .We had people coming to us, *students*, for advice. That was unsettling but it also made me think through what I said before I said it."

The other students who remarked on the "real world" experience were more direct. For them, the application of course content was a welcomed sight. A student in his junior year described his experience: "Isn't this what classes should be like? I probably won't remember 'X = Y' but I will remember trying to get Marcus to work on his lines for the play. He finally came around and that taught me more than any class that knowing about education and educating are two different things. And that's what people in the field will tell you. That's the kind of "facts" I want to know."

Future Directions

During Summer 2001, Sean Forbes and Boys and Girls Club leadership created the Auburn University Experience, a campus-based summer program involving Boys and Girls Club youth and staff as well as preservice teachers. This fall semester, preservice teachers are again on-site at the Auburn and Opelika Clubs, gaining field-based and authentic learning experiences while providing needed resources to the clubs. The Assessment and Evaluation class is scheduled to be taught this summer. The assessment work for the class will build upon previous assessments, focusing more on programming options for youth, particularly older youth, and maximizing the resources available in the community. Additionally, students in this class will have more formalized ways of connecting with the undergraduate students who build upon the assessment work. Cindy Reed was appointed to the Board of Directors for the Clubs in June 2001. She is chairing the strategic planning committee and her students will assist in this work as well. Other faculty members in our department are engaging in research that will benefit the clubs. Additionally, we continue to discuss the needs and agendas of our organizations as we seek ways to improve our collaborative efforts.

Summary

We have learned many lessons as we have engaged in our work together. For example, it is important to identify and consider agendas for the clubs and the college so that everyone involved benefits. When we are able to make our needs and agendas clear, it is much easier to find ways to support those needs, especially since so many of our needs overlap. Having a well-thought out plan is also important. Our efforts to connect educational leadership and preservice teacher classes was more accidental than intentional, although it was very beneficial. The next time that we do this we will be more purposeful in our efforts. Because everyone involved is very busy it is essential that Club leaders and other staff members and college professors (and others who become involved) communicate regularly about ideas and program possibilities. Additionally, it is essential that the dean and department head at the college and the Board of Directors and Executive Director at the Clubs be kept involved in preliminary discussions as well as final decision making. It has been important to establish both formal and informal agreements. We have found that it is important to keep the community involved and aware of our efforts to collaborate. By doing so, we have been able to identify additional resources and ideas. For example, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lee County is now an official partner with the West Alabama Learning Coalition, another college-community partnership. It has been important for us to consider the possibilities as well as the challenges facing us as we collaborate. At times it was difficult to coordinate efforts. Yet, we realized the benefits of our efforts and persevered. We embraced the value of the win-win opportunities that arose from our work and reminded ourselves of the importance of this work.

There have been numerous benefits reaped through our collaborative efforts. Club staff engaged in professional development opportunities such as presenting at conferences and participating in offerings at the university. Insights raised through the needs assessment and having volunteers at the clubs on a regular basis raised the level of expectations and awareness of club employees. By becoming aware of how others viewed the programs, procedures, and facilities, club employees were able to identify

additional areas for improvement and to build upon the strengths already present. Having students volunteer at the clubs has served as a conduit for hiring future employees. Many volunteers have learned more about the work of the clubs and the potential of the young people attending and have decided to consider Boys and Girls Clubs as a viable career choice.

There have been increased opportunities for club members through additional programs and tutoring sessions that have been offered by volunteers. Having reliable and committed volunteers on site helped to free-up staff members to attend to other needs at the clubs such as improving procedures and developing new policies. This helped the clubs to maximize their resources. Additionally, by bringing club members on campus for programming with preservice teachers, facilities were freed up for the club members remaining on site at the clubs. The university has served as a source for board members for the clubs, enriching the contacts and possibilities available. By having new board members and volunteers become increasingly aware of club offerings and needs, it has helped to market Boys and Girls Clubs to a wider group through informal conversations and formal presentations. There were also numerous opportunities for the students in both classes to gain new experiences and insights while knowing that they had made a difference. Having the clubs available as a field-based site for college students offers professors a unique opportunity as well. As professors, we are able to integrate our teaching and outreach duties, helping us to maximize our time while doing important work. College-Club partnerships have the potential to be mutually beneficial for all involved.

The greatest challenges facing our partnership work have been finding enough time, making sure that there is on-going and open communication, and navigating the different cultures at community agencies and colleges. Collaborative work takes more time up front, for planning, organizing, and coordinating. For club leaders who are already stretched too far and junior professors who must be concerned about earning tenure and promotion, it is sometimes difficult to make the time needed for coordination. However, we have continually reminded ourselves of the win-win opportunities available through our work and have kept trying to make our partnerships work. It has also been very important to communicate regularly and to involve all who need to be involved. This, too, takes time and a strong working knowledge of who should be involved and at what points in the planning process. Finally, the culture of colleges tends to be research oriented, reflective, and fairly bureaucratic. Colleges tend to be focused on "thinking about" doing. Community organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs are relatively small organizations focused on "doing" programming. It has taken us some time to develop strong working relationships, trust, and a deeper understanding of what each must contend with in their own institutions.

Discussion

We have been pleased so far with the partnership efforts between the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lee County and the College of Education. Both institutions have benefited, and more importantly, the students and youth from both institutions have benefited. The primary benefits to the clubs have been:

- A community presence that helps market Clubs
- A steady stream of interns and volunteers
- Access to state-of-the-art computer labs, gym, and other facilities
- Faculty and alumni who enhance the club's board
- Access to underutilized space in slower months, which is peak time for clubs
- Helping club members see that people who are educated care about them and providing additional role models
- Access to a college environment which can boost a child's self-esteem, giving them hope for the future

Our partnership with the Boys and Girls Clubs has also benefited the college in the following ways:

- Students have enriched and authentic learning opportunities; it is an opportunity to engage in "real world" activity
- Preservice teachers have an opportunity to try out new ideas in a safe setting before their student teaching experience
- By working in the clubs, students have opportunities to develop a greater awareness and experience working with diverse groups
- Students and faculty develop increased sensitivity to the needs of the community

Faculty members benefit from these partnerships through:

- Having a direct application of course content in a meaningful context
- Moving away from transmission models of education toward service learning
- Opportunities to fulfill the outreach mission of university

Collaborative work such as this benefits all involved. We have built bridges between teacher and leadership education and an important community agency. By doing so, we have learned about each other's needs while working and learning together, offering valuable lessons for our students and young people at the clubs.

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